



A Supervisory Newsletter from the Employee Advisory Service

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource — Employees

Call EAS: Olympia (360) 753-3260 Seattle (206) 720-3514 Spokane (509) 482-3686
Website: <http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

■ Q. I made a supervisor referral of my employee to EAS, but only in writing. I have not discussed the referral in person with him. Should I meet with him, too? I think he knows what he needs to do.

A. Although you put your supervisor referral in writing, you should also meet with your employee to discuss it. Such a discussion will increase the likelihood of your employee accepting the referral. Remind your employee that using EAS is confidential and that the EA professional will not disclose confidential information to you, unless the employee signs a consent. Also remind the employee that use of EAS will not jeopardize job security or promotional opportunities. These are standard elements in virtually all Employee Assistance Program (EAP) policies, and they are often issues of concern to employees that prevent follow-through with supervisor referrals. Indeed, most employees are not aware of, or may not remember, the provisions established by the organization's EAP policy. Provide an EAS brochure if you have one, and the phone number. Call EAS if you need brochures and your office doesn't have any.

■ Q. We referred one of our employees to EAS because she was having trouble with customer relationships. We wonder if she is suited for the position. Can EAS make this determination, so we can consider whether to keep her?

A. EAS would violate its ethical code and purpose, and alienate the workforce, if it agreed to assist management in determining whether employees were suitable for their specific positions. Even in the unlikely event that an employee were willing to give permission to EAS to play this role, it would violate EAP principles. EAS assists employees in resolving personal problems that may affect job performance and provide services that support this purpose. EAS would be seen as aligned solely with management's purposes if it played the role you describe. This would damage its reputation as a safe place to seek help. You should decide based upon the appraisal of your employee's performance or conduct whether she is suitable for the position. EAS will do everything it can to assist her without impeding your management role.

■ Q. My employee has severe performance problems. I hesitate to refer her to EAS because I fear EAS might discover some personal problem that makes us feel our hands are tied. This could interfere with our ability to dismiss her. What should I do?

A. Although you do not say how long the performance problems have continued, it is not unusual for supervisors to consider the EAS role only at the point at which they are ready to dismiss an employee. Any delay or interference with the goal to dismiss becomes undesirable. EAS will not disclose to you the nature of your employee's personal problems, if any exist. Regardless, EAS cannot interfere with administrative decisions of the organization. It is possible that EAS may salvage your employee. This will cause you concern if you have already made a decision to dismiss her. As a result, you will feel torn between allowing the EAS process to continue and moving forward with her dismissal. This is a common dilemma for supervisors who have not made supervisor referrals *early*, when performance problems were less severe. This frustration often leads supervisors to think that the EAP got in their way, even though it is they who have placed themselves in this position.

■ Q. My employee misses a lot of work because of frequent migraine headaches. He is seeing the city's best migraine specialist, so I haven't mentioned EAS to him. His performance is good, except when he is sick. What can EAS do, since they aren't doctors?

A. Although EAS does not provide medical advice or prescribe treatment, they can provide useful information on community resources. EAS might share resources with your employee such as nutritionists, mental health and wellness professionals, and more. Many types of resources have assisted in the effective treatment of migraines. In some instances, employees may be unaware of such resources because the philosophy of a primary care giver may preclude referral of a migraine sufferer to such resources. Be careful not to rule out the type of help that EAS might provide an employee with a performance problem. In this case, the supervisor referral would be based upon the performance issue associated with your employee's ongoing difficulty of being available to work.

■ Q. I supervise an employee who is very bright and witty, but difficult in her interpersonal communication. She and I don't get along. Still, I tolerate her style because we need her expertise. Can EAS give me pointers to "put her in her place?"

A. Use EAS to find and make personal changes that will help you create a more effective relationship with this employee. You may need a combination of increased assertiveness skills and increased tolerance for the style she brings to the workplace. Focus on deciding what is appropriate or inappropriate about her communication and what you can accept or not accept about it. Using EAS for your own growth in this way, and discovering how to manage a challenging relationship, will be a more practical approach than considering EAS as a "ring coach" in the conflict you are having with your employee.

NOTES:

Visit EAS on our website at:
<http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

